

Submission to the Inquiry into Road Toll Regimes

From Yasmina Kovacevic

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Received by
Ms Rachel Buist
Date: 24/05/2022
Resolved to publish Yes / No

To the Portfolio Committee,

Upon receiving news that the community of Bexley businesses and residents will finally have their voices heard as part of this inquiry, I as many others, found a renewed energy and hope that things will be changing for the better.

Thank you for providing us this platform and opportunity to hear first-hand, the difficulties and persistent downward spiralling of quality of life and business operating conditions for Bexley as a direct result of toll avoidance behaviours by motorists.

The Committee's Terms of reference are disappointingly narrow and overly prescriptive which has means that our submissions need to align to a set of criteria that ignores the obvious area of inquiry.

For this reason, and to ensure my submission aligns to the scope of this inquiry, I am submitting this document under criteria:

(k) any other related matter. (ToRs)

The question I am now framing under this criterion is:

Has there been any noted increase in toll avoidance behaviours as a result of the additional toll imposed to the M5 east road/tunnel and if so what impact has this has if any, on the residents, businesses that operate, reside on these local and state roads through Bexley?

The answer is YES. There has been a massive increase of toll avoidance behaviour due to the increasing cost of the tolls imposed by the private motorway operators. There has been a failure on Transport NSW to forecast and predict this unintended consequence on local communities and businesses that have borne the brunt of a now dysfunctional road tolling regime.

The behaviour of motorists is motivated by financial savings, hence they depart the motorway at a point of their journey where they can still ,relatively easily, reach their destination, without being required to pay the additional toll.

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Toll costs

South West M5 motorway

Vehicle type	Cost
Class A	\$5.03
Class B	\$15.09

Additional toll charges to the M5 East:

Vehicle type	Cost
Class A	\$1.48 flagfall
	\$0.5477 (per kilometre)
	Capped at \$7.52
Class B	\$4.44 flagfall
	\$1.6431 (per kilometre)
	Capped at \$22.56

It should be noted that the majority of commuters are travelling from the south west to the city. These households are generally on lower incomes, with high household debt. They are highly motivated to avoid the additional tolls by exiting at Bexley Rd. This has a direct adverse impact on all residents and business community that are faced with:

Daily high level pollution from heavy trucks, cars and semi-trailers that are toll avoiding and exiting at Bexley Rd and at King Georges Rd to use local and state roads that are NOT designed for heavy traffic.

Toll avoidance behaviour is having the following direct impact:

1. Business unable to attract customer base due to heavy traffic, congestion and pollution as a direct result of increased traffic particularly light to medium size trucks that avoid the higher toll payments to M5 east
2. Businesses required to keep their doors shut due to the noise vibration arising out of increased traffic from toll avoidance.

3. Commercial and retail building owners landlords unable to attract longer term retail/commercial tenants along Bexley Rd business district due to the impact of toll avoidance on traffic flow and congestion
4. Commercial Building owners unable to increase their rent to match inflation, due to an inability to attract prospective tenants as a direct result of the unfavourable and undesirable business operating conditions- increased traffic noise, pollution, vibration from heavy trucks due to toll avoidance behaviours.

Without disclosing personal details, I can also advise that:

- There are several businesses that have recently ceased operating, caused by the impossible operating conditions where customers avoid the entire area due to congestion, lack of parking options(due to Transport NSW imposing clearways along Forest Rd Bexley that has inadvertently attracted even more toll avoidance behaviour).
- Award winning fast food businesses are facing critical safety issues for their customers as a result of heavy vehicles semi-trailers and trucks using Forest Rd to bypass additional toll charges to the M5 East.
- A well known and established middle eastern restaurant failed to renew their lease a at April 2022 due to impossible business operating conditions, the landlord seeking an adjustment in rent to match inflation yet the business owner not having the required customer base to ensure that costs could be covered and rent could be paid- all this as a direct result of toll avoidance behaviour and increased traffic congestion, plus lack of parking amenities thanks to transport NSW.
- There are many stories like this one along the shopping strip of Bexley. Once a pleasant local area shopping district, now a nightmare for people, a safety hazard for mothers and parents wanting to go for a stroll tot heir local shops.

Using arguments as Transport NSW has done so with our countless submissions, that Forest Rd is a state road is **not** conducive to supporting well-functioning and thriving local business districts for its residents. Forest Rd is a NSW State owned road but it is also:

- Home to many residential dwelling along the Bexley locality
- Home to many previously, thriving small businesses that service the community
- Home to many specialised homecare aged care and disability care homes and specialty stores
- Home to several public and private schools adjacent to Forest Rd directly impacted by the increased traffic congestion, noise and pollution for our youngest citizens.

Recommendations

In the interest of returning Bexley business and shopping districts to their former glory and enjoyable ambient without the onslaught of traffic congestion, I make the following recommendations:

1. That the NSW Government and its responsible portfolio **reverse** the imposed clearways along Forest Rd Bexley business district and satellite business districts

between Wolli Creek Rd and Queen Victoria Street. as this has created a direct incentive for further tollway avoidance behaviour. Once the limited parking for local residents/shoppers are returned, for Transport NSW to conduct an independent study/evaluation into the impact this reversal of clearways has on the local business district using the current state as a baseline. Recommendations to be implemented by NSW Government.

2. A study into the equity of approach to toll avoidance prevention strategies, but particularly for heavy vehicles and trucks. Transport NSW to conduct an evaluation of the toll avoidance prevention strategies in place for the Bexley area/M5 East and in this study, to compare these strategies to other existing strategies that work. The findings to be made public in full, and recommendations to be supported by NSW Government. The inequity across Sydney is evident, with one set of rules being applied at the Lane Cove Tunnel scenario and another set of rules for residents in the poorer end of town. This inequity of rules needs to stop. We live in a fair and equitable society so the rules should not favour those in more affluent areas.
3. Toll avoidance by motorist using the full length or the greatest distance of the south west M5 are then also exiting at Bexley Rd which means they are benefiting the most and then not paying their way. Transport NSW in conjunction with relevant departments, agencies and the private tollway operators, to conduct a study into a fairer toll charging system that ensures those that utilise the greatest distance pay their fair share at exit points including Bexley Rd. This needs to be looked at from a fairness perspective. This will also have a positive impact on the Bexley businesses and residences along Forrest Rd Bexley.

Thank you

Yasmina Kovacevic

Owner and resident of

Bexley 2207.